



Paraglide

Bragg firemen win DoD award

by Jacine Burton

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Community involvement, increased use of technology and a commitment to training earned the Fort Bragg Fire Department the Department of Defense's Southeast Region Fire Department of the Year award.

The fire department competed against similar departments at Fort Stewart, Hunter Army Airfield, Fort Gordon and Fort Jackson, according to Fort Bragg Deputy Chief Steve Blackburn. While Blackburn and the members of the department are proud of the achievement, they had hoped to win the DoD Fire Department of the Year Award.

"We hope to be in that position next year," said Blackburn. "We are probably one of the most active departments in the Department of Defense in regards to responses, and we're also one of the most proactive departments when it comes to training and technology."

That being said, Blackburn was still pleased with the award.

"To be recognized at all for what we've done over the past year is good," he said.

The department was evaluated in three areas: customer service, innovation and quality of life initiatives.

In the area of customer service, the Fort Bragg department prided itself on its innovative fire prevention, which reduced fire losses in unit areas. The Fire Marshal Training Program trained 416 soldiers as unit-fire marshals who conduct fire inspections and identify life and safety hazards.

The department also placed Automatic External Defibrillators on all first-response vehicles, a move Blackburn believes will save lives. "In many instances the fire truck is the first vehicle on the scene," he said. "By having the defibrillators and people trained to use them, we will be able to save lives."

In the realm of innovation, the department led the way in hazardous material training and planning for response in the event of a weapons-of-mass-destruction event.

The fire department conducted hazardous material technician training to increase the department's certification level to 94 percent. The department has an internal goal of having all fire fighters certified to respond to these events. The department also trained soldiers from the 21st and 101st

chemical companies to the HAZMAT-technician level.

The department also set the pace in developing a joint task force plan with Cumberland County, Fayetteville and Pope Air Force Base that would support a mass casualty incident response and produce a unified command structure for joint operations involving fire, emergency medical services and law enforcement agencies.

"One of our major goals is to have 100 percent certification on HAZMAT," said Blackburn. "In bigger departments they have people committed solely to HAZMAT. On Fort Bragg we don't have the staffing, so everybody has to be trained. We cross-staff so that we are prepared to respond and function at the highest level.